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THE HIGH SCHOOL'S CURE OF SOULS

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THE HIGH SCHOOL'S CURE OF SOULS

The ancient state at least in theory cared for the ethical development of its youth; the early church assumed and magnified this function at the beginning of the Christian Era, and thanks to its universal presence and sway, could touch in some degree all the people. The separation of church and state, and the loss of catholicity in the external church have brought about the present conditions respecting religious and moral training: the church is no longer adequate for the task, and the state has not yet fully got its shoulders under the burden. This paper is written in the firm belief that the state, and especially its chief educational agent, the school, must and will assume complete responsibility for the development of moral character in all its youth; the trend in this direction is already well developed and unmistakable.

The school, as contrasted with the home, the calling, the church, and some other educational agencies, wields its greatest force *thru* the intellectual processes; not merely *upon* these processes, but *thru* them upon the whole being; the home has far greater direct power over both emotion and will, as has probably the calling; the peculiar function of the school with respect to the formation of character lies in the *enlightenment and enfranchisement of the will thru reason*; in other words, in creating a body of knowledge and a power of intellect which shall stimulate and illuminate a righteous will.

Probably a child's moral possibilities may be blasted before he is fourteen years old; certainly, on the other hand, much may be done before that age in laying the foundation for a complete moral character, in the form of physical and mental habits; but genuine moral character, autonomy of the will, the power of intelligent self-direction, does not and can not form before this age, but must in the main be developed later. A

period varying somewhat with the individual, but in general not far from the age of high school attendance, is marked by the transition from the stage of imitation and obedience to that of volitional intelligence and self-direction; there is reason to believe that the high school period is even more critical and determinative than that of the college; the fact that more religious conversions occur in the high school period than in any other can not be without significance with respect to moral development.

The two principles set forth briefly in the foregoing paragraphs lead to the proposition that the years from fourteen to eighteen offer to the school its supreme opportunity for character building; the high school, of all grades of school education, should take the most active and effective part in the formation of character.

All this becomes far more striking when we remember that out of the high school come practically all our *leaders* of every kind, social, moral, religious, political, and intellectual; thru a single high school boy the opportunity may be given to determine the conduct and destiny of a dozen, a score, a thousand, of those who do not enjoy the privilege of any part of a liberal education, thru the leadership which that boy may exercise in his mature life.

What do we find to be the actual condition in our high schools in this respect? The teacher, here as elsewhere in our schools, is of unimpeachable character; it is foolish to doubt or deny the good moral influence of the school. With the cry of godlessness against the schools, now fortunately falling into discredit, no one who knows the schools has a moment's sympathy. The high school, like the elementary school, certainly exerts a beneficent influence upon the habits and character of its pupils. But this influence is almost entirely confined, as its admirers admit or even assert, to the operation of the personality of the teacher and the work and order of the school,—in other words, to the kind of influence and the kind of training in which the home, the calling, and social life peculiarly excel. The peculiar duty of the school, which can not be fulfilled by any other agency, is,



as we have seen, other than this, namely the creation of ethical enlightenment and of a rational will. And in this respect the high school falls utterly short of its ideal; *upon* the intellect the school does assuredly work (tho not always with the best results even upon the intellectual side), but *thru* the intellect *upon* the will the school works but very little.

Let us take a conspicuous example: Plato discusses at length the study of literature in the school; what is his chief theme? The working of the literature upon character! His criterion of selection for school literature is the question: "What kind of character will the work in question produce?" Ruthlessly he rejects every mythus, however honored by immemorial tradition, which might imperil the moral ideals of the youth. Does this story inculcate false ideas of the gods? Cast it out! Does this set forth a false conception of courage? It is unfit for the school. Homer and Hesiod, the very Bible of the Greeks, are subjected without reserve to the test of moral influence, and large parts are condemned and eliminated. What of the teaching of literature in the modern high school? Is moral influence the chief consideration, or a prominent element in our discussions? Turn to the Bible of the secondary school, the Report of the Committee of Ten; one finds much about linguistics and nothing about the play of literature upon the soul, upon the moral nature. Plato's mythus was history as well as literature; how does history fare in the Report? The conference expresses itself in no less than thirty-five resolutions, but we find no syllable declaring that the study of history may carve ineffaceable impressions of honor and courage, of humanity and civic righteousness, of devotion and noble life, upon the heart of the youth. No mention of all this in the formal resolutions: a search thru the thirty-six pages of discussion reveals a few incidental, one might almost say accidental, remarks, confined apparently to two pages (169-170), which imply the ethical value of the subject, and these are nearly all *quoted*. This is only the more astonishing when we consider that the history conference dealt also with civil government and political economy—that is, with the whole body of the social sciences; if the ethical thought

of our day reveals any one fact above all others, it is that human character rests upon social relations, and that social intelligence is an indispensable part of the kind of character demanded by modern democratic life.

In the report of a conference of high school teachers, held at one of the largest state universities, the following are pronounced to be the purposes of secondary instruction in English literature:

"The purpose of secondary instruction in English literature is as follows: First, to enable the student to write and speak with clearness, vigor, and grace; second, to acquaint him at first hand with a few of the best literary products of English and American thought; third, to cultivate a sense of literary style; fourth, to inculcate a love of the best literature. Under the first head is included the development of the power to read aloud with sufficient skill to afford pleasure to the hearer." In a resolution on "The preparation of the teacher," no mention is made of ethical character or appreciation.

An examination of the proceedings of important gatherings for discussing the problems of the secondary school will show in general that these meetings are but little interested in ethical training; the question has been forced upon them in two or three ways, particularly in connection with the problems of discipline and order and the peculiarly modern questions of athletics and fraternities; aside from this enforced discussion of moral culture, little is said about it. Above all, there is no adequate recognition of the positive and distinctive function of the high school which we have endeavored to point out. How pathetically weak has been the position of high school and college authorities in many cases regarding the ethics of athletics and athletic contests, comes to light on not a few occasions; all honor to those who have stood unwaveringly for truth and honor at all times, let the price be what it might; they have rendered a great and notable service to moral culture in the secondary school.

The fact is that the secondary school teacher is too much absorbed in the intellectual aspect of his particular subject; it is this aspect which he has learned to know and respect in

the university; the plan of the school, the form of the curriculum, the examinations, the college entrance requirements, all tend in the same direction, until the very idea of ethical education is strange and uncongenial to the high school teacher. Nor can the over-intellectualism of the university graduate be a surprize to any one who realizes the vast transformation from the older type of American college, with its deep ethical and religious character, to the university of today with its intense specialized teaching and study on the one hand, and its absorbing athletic and social life on the other—a transformation pictured with power and fidelity by Mr. Clarence F. Birdseye in his really great book, *Individual training in our colleges*.

What the American high school needs is just what English Rugby needed and what the immortal Arnold gave it thru his teaching and example, and as Hughes says, "above all thru his unwearied zeal in creating 'moral thoughtfulness' in every boy with whom he came into personal contact."¹ Woe unto the land if its future leaders lack moral thoughtfulness in its fullest sense: both the righteous intent and the practical wisdom; only by these two elements combined in our statesmen and citizens can the republic be saved and the nation fulfil its destiny.

Youth—the high school age—offers two golden opportunities for character formation: the sense of personal honor and the growing realization of social relations; upon these two, education may build broad and high. President Hall has abundantly set forth the intense power of the feeling of honor; it is for the school to mold that sense and enlist it on the side of righteousness—for who does not see that it fights on all sides of almost every question? It went sadly to waste in the Spartan lad with his stolen fox under his tunic; but he at least had the moral support of his own social system; how much worse is the waste when a high school pupil knows no higher object of devotion than success in a ball game at any cost, or the acquisition of "souvenirs" filched from

¹ Preface to *Tom Brown's schooldays*.

friends or foes? Where is the sense of honor estrayed to when school and college youth will cheat and connive at cheating their athletic opponents by playing one of their number under a false name, or other such dishonorable and unsportsmanlike tricks? Is it any wonder that thousands of grown men resent the name liar with a blow, but daily with unruffled soul lie and cheat by word and act? It would be utter injustice to lay the whole blame or even the chief blame for this low sense of honor upon the high school pupils or even the college students; the elders, teachers, parents, the general public, can not wash their hands of guilt; the very same lads who led in the unworthy trickery would with right and strong guidance have repudiated it with scorn, as is proven by the moral tone of many a high school and perhaps some colleges.

It is trite to say that the youth takes his criteria of honor from the company he keeps, and chiefly from his elders; so far as the school is concerned in its present form there is probably no place in which the sense of honor is so much affected as the athletic field, including the bleachers on the one hand and the rubbing-rooms on the other, and adding of course the endless talking-over to which every game and every incident are subjected. Now in England the whole body of both teachers and students engage in athletics; in America the majority of the teachers have little interest in athletics, little time to devote to them, and small influence upon athletic ideals and standards; the result is that the standards of the coach and trainer are dominant, and those standards are generally low and partial; to this is partly due the furious and devastating force of the passion to win, the most threatening element in the whole athletic situation. It should be quite clear that the blame for all this does *not* rest at the door of the athletic trainer—he does just what we might fairly expect him to do; we should all do much the same if we were in his place; the real fault is one of omission on the part of the rest of the teachers. Strictly speaking, the danger is not the great desire to win, which is an indispensable part of sport, but rather the defect of those higher ethical and chivalric ideals which should be supplied by the teachers whose minds are not strained by the

peculiar situation in which the coach finds himself. Whatever is being done to ventilate the conduct of athletics and bring it all under the cognizance and control of the whole body of the school helps to cure this evil.

Whatever is true of athletic contests is true, with slight modifications, of other interscholastic affairs—mainly, of course, those in oratory and debate; only it is easier here to get the right ideals into the place of power.

Here let stress be laid incidentally upon one of the most crying perils of our higher education, the usurpation by interscholastic contests, chiefly athletic, of a place and prominence utterly beyond their merits. Not athletics, be it noted, but inter-school contests: *true athletics and physical culture are yet far from having place and regard enough*; and the exorbitant demands of the contests consume the interest and effort that ought to be devoted to real athletic work among the general body of the students. It would be absurd to censure the *student* for his intense and eager interest in contests: that is but the inevitable result of a healthy and vigorous nature in youth; the blame lies with the elders, both teachers and parents, who instead of wisely using and moderating the impulses of youth, weakly yield to them, or even act so as to add fuel to the flames. Both college and school papers and the daily press announce the opening of the fall session by cartoons of the football "hero" in full armor; all of which may be meant as jest, but is the expression of a most serious fact. "University ideals," at least so far as student opinion goes, are no longer of thought or scholarship, to say nothing of character and leadership, but of the gridiron and the diamond—or rather of the winning of victories thereon.

The positive fruit of the education of the sense of honor should be a lofty, well-formed, *personal ideal*, embracing body, intellect, and principles of conduct. A modified form of the athlete's standard of physical habit and efficiency should be cultivated in every boy and girl: to be straight and sturdy, well-muscled, quick and sure in movement, and not easily "winded"; to have a good appetite, in quantity and also in discrimination, but to have it under the command of the will;

these should be dear to the heart of youth, and nature has planted vigorous germs of all of them in every normal child. To know what one knows and be fully aware when one does not know, to see clearly with the eye of the mind as well as with that of the body, to hate obscurity, confusion, ambiguities, evasions, and to worship the crystal light of true perception and right reason,—these too belong to the personal ideal of the educated man. It need hardly be said that stimulus and nourishment of these two ideals, the bodily and the intellectual, ought to be the largest, as it is the highest service of the study of the classics,—but mere linguistic study has no power to these ends. The third element in the personal ideal is that of the self-determining righteous will: here above all places *honor* is the word to conjure with. There is that in the soul of every youth that resonates to the fiery answer of the old Hebrew, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" The 'hate of hates and scorn of scorns,' and the abhorrence of all things mean and low can never before or after be so quickly fanned into flame and strengthened into a steady light and warmth for life. These, then, are hints of the elements indispensable to rounded humanity and therefore belonging to the ideal by which every man should measure himself.

So much for the sense of honor and its possible fruits: we turn now to the new perception that the youth has of his place as a member of a social community.

The *sense* of social relationships is largely bred by the same converse and association that breed the sense of honor; but there is a rational and clear *comprehension* of social relationships which arises only from long-continued and progressive thinking; this we may call *social intelligence*. Such social intelligence is indispensable to moral character, and especially to *leadership*, hence its culture is a peculiar duty of the high school. There is no morality worth speaking of nor worth cultivating which is not social; mere self-interest is not really to the interest of self, to say nothing of its worthlessness to the body social; it is still true that he who sets out to save his life—for himself—shall lose it. The youth who goes out from the high school without a deep and ruling sense of the

intimate bond between his conduct and destiny and those of his fellows, has been cheated of his birthright as an educated man. Plato voiced the great law of higher education when he declared that the men who had escaped from chains and the cave and had beheld the truth of things, must go back and rescue those still in bonds and ignorance. The high school boy and girl can understand what is obscure to the child in the eighth grade,—that we are bound each to each—father to child, brother to sister, friend to friend, and man to man; that my conduct and destiny affect your conduct and destiny and yours mine. Moreover, this priceless truth which yesterday was concealed by childish immaturity, will tomorrow too often, alas! be obscured by what we call disillusion, which is really illusion and blindness of heart. The message that no man lives unto himself brings a new light and may bring a new resolve into the eyes of early youth; from the same message the riper youth or the grown man too often turns, as from the dream of an enthusiast.

The curriculum of the high school² must be still further vitalized and humanized; far more attention must be paid to the presentation of life in history and literature: this does not mean merely more hours per week devoted to these subjects, but, in addition and more important, that the vital ethical element in them be given its due place. Literature is far too much linguistics and verbalism; who does not know how the literature of power is daily robbed of all its force and reality for the student by being turned into dead matter for mental gymnastics? *Wilhelm Tell*, as an exercise ground for rules of grammar and syntax, is the type of our literature work in foreign languages; hopes and fears, courage and cowardice, tyranny and patriotism, agony and death itself, are all drowned under a play of philological practise. Over against all this place the Greek boy with his Homer, his soul aglow with the throbbing life of the story, seeing as in a clear mirror the actual warm life, the glow of anger, the smoldering fire

² On all this see G. Stanley Hall's expert and powerful, if possibly in part extreme, criticisms, in his chapter on "Intellectual development and education" in his *Adolescence*, or the abridgment thereof, *Youth*.

of resentment, the play of conduct and destiny—always a picture of the life of man and a revelation of moral laws which rule over character and destiny.

The same is true of history: we mean no disrespect to scholarship when we say that it is far more important for the American youth to thrill with instinctive admiration or reprobation of deeds fair or base than it is for him to know exactly what all the authorities say upon a mooted point. Unless the lives and characters of Washington and Lincoln and Arnold move the feelings and modify the will of the student, the teaching has been fatally incomplete; unless the vision of his country's ascent and glory make the student another sort of man in his social and political relations, he has not gained from history its true gift.

What is needed is that *ethical revelation of the world*³ which the great Herbart pronounced the supreme task of education. We can not but feel that his followers have too often forgotten the end in the means: they have been true to their leader in emphasizing the importance of instruction, but have not always remembered that instruction deserves its high place only in so far as it is *educative* (*ersziehender Unterricht*), that is, in so far as it breeds moral character.

That the world is not ethically revealed to us is plain from our attitude toward many of its phenomena: most of us laugh at a drunken man; yet no one to whom the spectacle is ethically revealed could laugh, for he sees in the reeling, grotesque figure all the shame and agony which are in and back of it; the debased humanity, perhaps the ruined life of wife and children. We should not cry war on such slight provocation if war had been ethically revealed by our study of history; to know that the battle of Gettysburg was fought on a certain day, with certain losses on Union and Confederate sides and the victory on the side of the Federals, can not conceivably affect the feelings nor move the will; let every student read Lincoln's exquisite letter to the Mrs. Bixley who had lost five

³ It seems fair to render thus Herbart's phrase "*ästhetische Darstellung*," in view of his identifying the ethical judgment with the esthetic, and of his emphatic insistence elsewhere that character is the only conceivable aim of education.

sons in the war. (I have just consulted a dictionary of United States history, compiled by an eminent authority, but altho we find Binneys and Birneys and Bissells, this woman, to whom Lincoln himself wrote a letter of deepest reverence, has not even a line.) Let the youth also get some sense of Lincoln's own agony of soul as he saw himself compelled by his sworn duty to send more and more of the sons and fathers of northern homes to perish on southern battle-fields. Let every lad get some insight into the privation, suffering, fearful drain of blood and treasure that war involves.

It is true, of course, that the pomp and circumstance of war, and still more its heroisms and its possible justice, belong to its ethical presentation as well as do the tragedy and human agony; the glory and the heroism, however, are as a rule sufficiently imprest on youth outside of the school, and being only one side of the truth, and having a powerful hold upon emotions and will, render it all the more imperative that the other side should be revealed by the school as the agency which labors to give a balanced and rational conception of all things.

It may be allowable to mention here three *ethical ideas* or principles which seem to the writer of paramount importance to the proper development of moral intelligence in the mind of the youth. The first is the truth that man is essentially *social*, that he is man only as he is social, and that hence, in Scripture phrase, no man liveth unto himself, but that the conduct, character, and destiny of each of us affect others, tending to make them better or worse, happier or less happy. Concerning this let us note first that it is a fact, not a theory nor an ethical precept; it has always imprest great minds, both the intellectual, as in the case of Aristotle, who defined man as the social being, and the ethical souls, who have all perceived that this truth lies at the root of the ethical as such. It need hardly be added that a clear perception of the fact, vitally revealed in pictures of actual life, leads naturally to the sense of social responsibility.

The child has no innate idea of this truth; he grows up with his wants constantly satisfied and so without any deep im-

pression of his own dependence upon father and mother; of their solicitude for him, and of the extent to which their happiness is bound up in his character and happiness, he has no proper conception; unless, of course, all this has been revealed to his growing intelligence by careful instruction from day to day and year to year. Every high school principal has known boys who were set upon leaving school, altho their parents ardently desired them to continue; in many cases the boy simply has not got any glimpse of the bearing of his conduct upon the joy or sorrow of his parents. Still less does the average youth perceive that his conduct and welfare touch and modify lives all about him, first near, then, in less degree no doubt, lives remote from him in both space and time, including the unborn who are later to inherit from him either individually or socially.

Those who have dealt with boys must have been imprest with the fact that a boy often seems strangely indifferent to warnings relating to his own future welfare: he seems to feel that he has a right to hazard his own fate at his own discretion. The same boy can often be touched and moved instantly by the fact that his undesirable conduct grieves and saddens his parents, impoverishes their lives, and darkens their declining days. The lad is more right than wrong: if his conduct affected only his own fate, who shall say that he might not then do whatever seemed right in his own eyes? The true ground of his duty is the social bond that makes his welfare one with that of those who love him.

The second ethical idea to be imprest upon the youth is the truth touching his own relation to society: he ought to be shown his *indebtedness* to the community for nurture and culture, physical and spiritual. This idea can be grasped in its simpler form in early years: that is, the child can see clearly how much he owes to his parents and near friends; but this is far from sufficient for full social morality. The high school age brings the larger view of society in its economic and spiritual aspects which enables the mind to grasp the fact that each

individual is indebted not only to parents, but also and far more deeply and essentially to generations past away, and to leaders and heroes and progressive and devoted spirits on every hand. The youth is not furnished for moral intelligence until he understands that human progress and the high social state to which he is born are possible only because many men are willing to give more than they receive, to serve greatly and be served little, to sacrifice private and personal ease and gain to the good of all.

These two ideas lead naturally to the third,—that life gets its significance and worth from *service*. History and literature reveal the truth that not only the Man of Nazareth, but all whose names are most highly cherished and adored, came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and are truly admirable because they did so. Our own annals are rich in this respect, with Franklin, Washington, Lincoln, and unnumbered less illustrious but not less worthy names. This idea forms the true first principle of the relation of each of us to the common weal, and has power to transform and elevate the whole conduct of life. Note again that the child is far from possessing any original or instinctive conception of this truth: he rather inclines by nature to think that a man is great in proportion as he gets, possesses, enjoys. He needs instruction and illumination in order to perceive that service is the highest mark of greatness.

All this is impossible and to attempt it would be worse than useless, without deep moral earnestness in the teacher. The moral education of the school is accomplished largely thru the play of the teacher's righteous judgment upon the subject-matter of the curriculum. "No direct instruction," says Arnold's biographer, "could leave on the pupils' minds a livelier image of his disgust at moral evil, than the black cloud of indignation which past over his face when speaking of the crimes of Napoleon or Cæsar, and the dead pause which followed, as if the acts had just been committed in his very presence."⁴ In fact, while there are valuable specific means

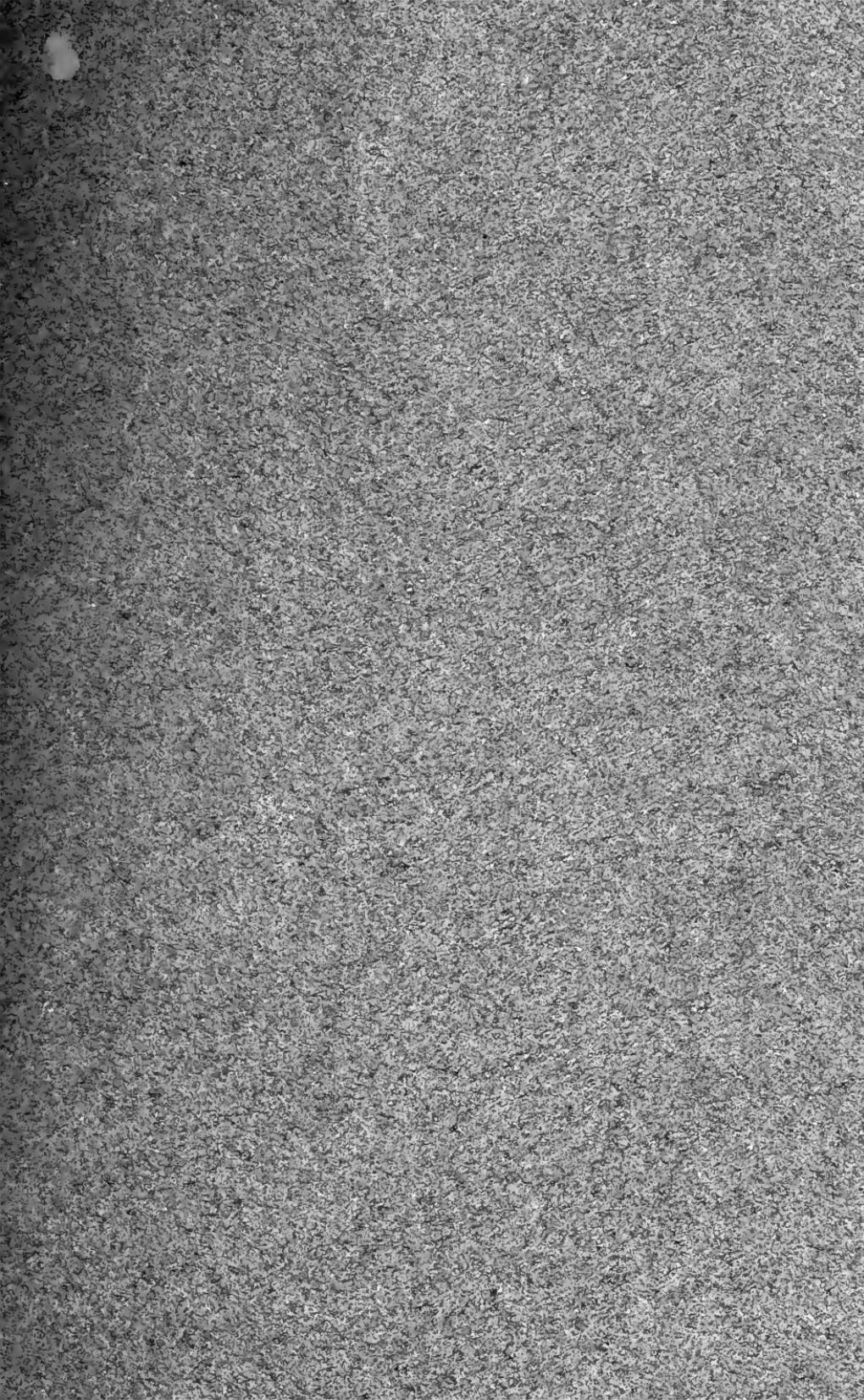
* Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, p. 142.

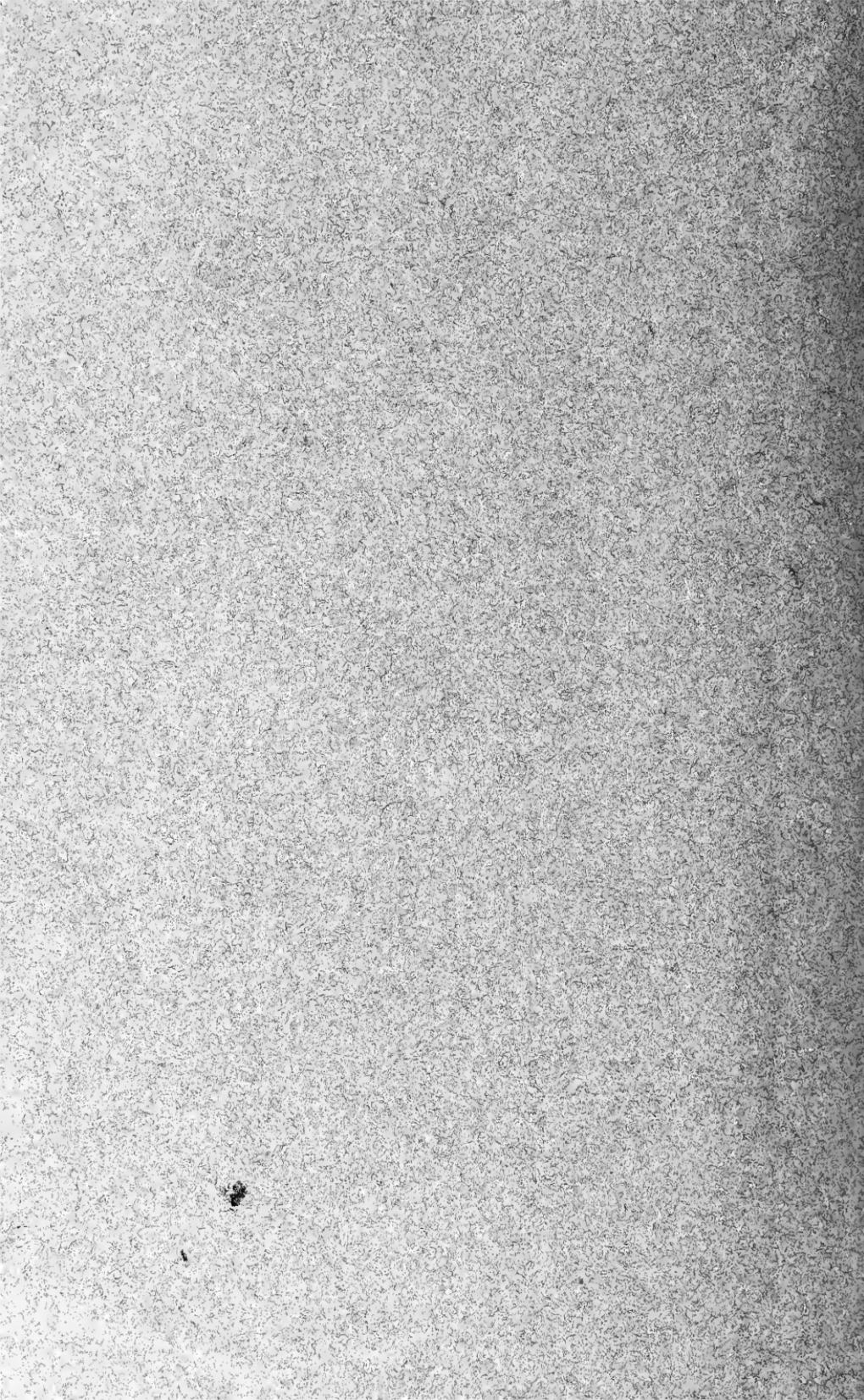
and instruments for moral education in the school, such as we have mentioned, history, literature, and the social sciences, yet the teacher is always the indispensable *agent*, without whom all these are but idle instruments. Let the high school teachers become once possesst with a sense of their opportunity and their responsibility, and ways will not be wanting. But the great theme of the person and opportunity of the high school teacher, and especially the tragic need of more *men* in our American high schools, is no topic for an addendum to this paper; fortunately the import of the subject is dawning upon the minds of educators and the more intelligent public.

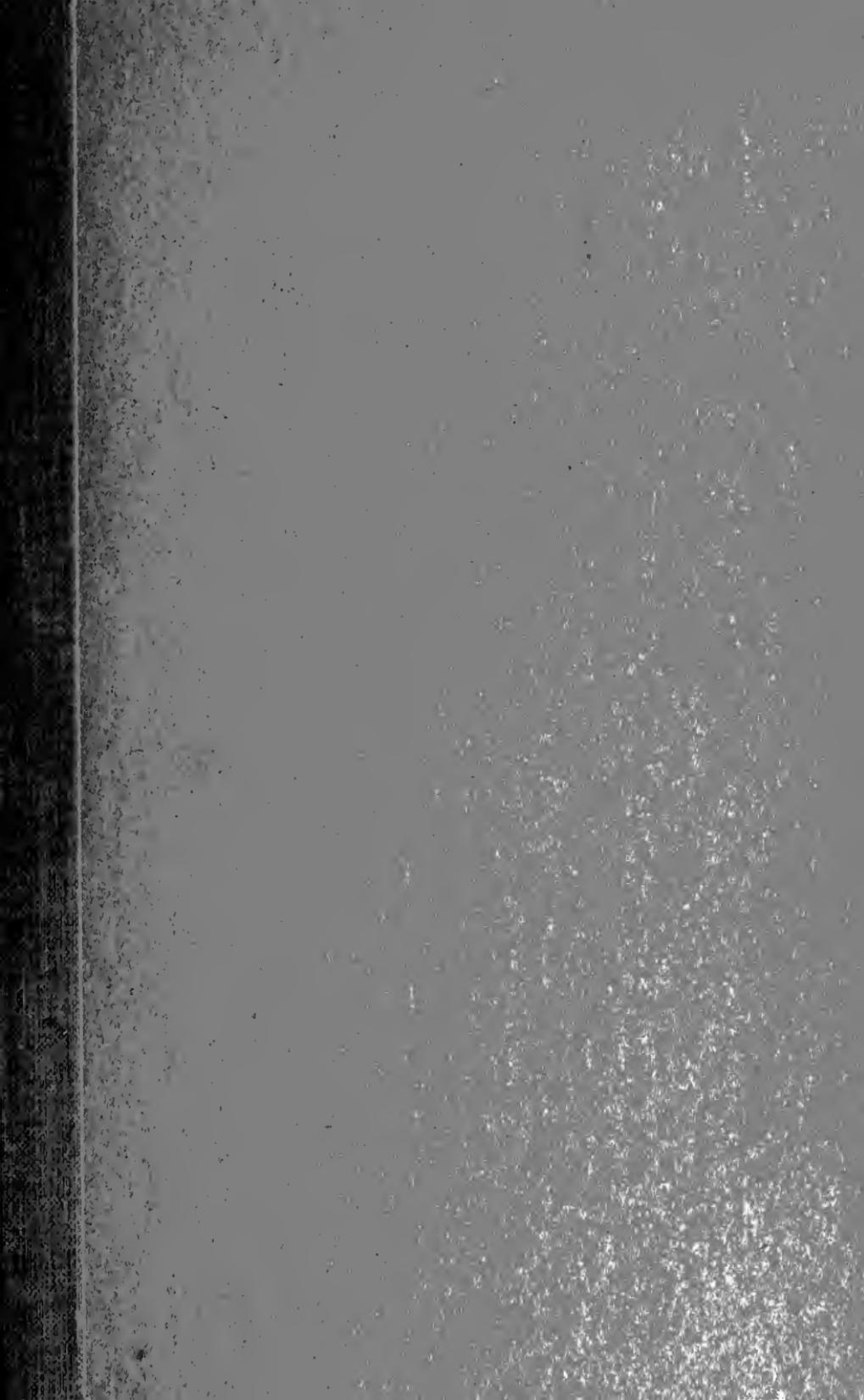
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